

**ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TRANSLATIONS OF
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EL VOCERO de PUERTO RICO

"Melecio Accused of Bias Towards PNP"

By Dennise Y. Pérez

Tuesday, March 25, 2003

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Until a few months ago, he received their praise and even tributes, but now that he presides over Pedro Rosselló's 2004 campaign committee, Juan R. Melecio is accused of having acted with bias in favor of the New Progressive Party (PNP).

Héctor Ferrer, representative of the Popular Democratic Party (PPD), called on the former chairman of the CEE to explain to the country his reasons for not responding to and taking action on the multiple complaints that Ferrer's group filed against the PNP. Ferrer accused Melecio of having been an accomplice in violations of the Electoral Act involving the siphoning of campaign funds by Rosselló and the PNP.

"Today we call upon this man to explain to the country why on so many occasions in which complaints of violations of the Electoral Act were filed against former governor Rosselló and members of his party, he, as chairman of the CEE, failed to act on those complaints in a responsible and objective manner," stated Ferrer.

Representatives José "Conny" Varela and Sylvia Corajo were present along with Ferrer.

"In the past few days, there has been talk about credibility and objectivity on the part of Judge Melecio during the years in which he presided over the CEE. Today we are enumerating the plethora of complaints that were submitted to his attention, some of which were accompanied by court orders instructing him to take action, and he failed to do so," expressed Ferrer.

When a journalist asked the legislator why Melecio's alleged acts of favoritism, which date back to 1996, are being brought up now, Ferrer stated that the former judge has now entered the political arena, so it is Ferrer's responsibility to point out these acts at the same level.

"If he enters the political arena, we, the Popular Party, have the duty to report these matters politically," he said.

In response to the line of argument that in the view of the Popular Party, Melecio's character has changed from hero to villain, Ferrer stated that "Melecio has never been a hero."

As proof of this, Ferrer cited the case brought by César Miranda against a group of legislators and Pedro Rosselló in 1996, in which the latter were charged with having advertised in favor of the gubernatorial campaign in order to avoid the limit on media-related expenses. That complaint was rejected by Melecio, and when the PPD appealed his decision to the Superior Court, the Court ordered that an evidentiary hearing be held, but this never came to be.

Ferrer pointed out six other cases in which Melecio acted against the interests of the PPD, but Ferrer failed to answer the question whether he considered the decisions that the former judge had issued against the PNP to have been equally invalid.

The Popular Party even accused Melecio of being a friend of convicted PNP members Víctor Fajardo and Edison Mislá. When asked how threatened the PPD felt by Melecio as a political figure, Ferrer answered, "The PPD is going to win the elections with or without Melecio."

[Photograph caption:] From the left, representatives José Varela, Héctor Ferrer, and Sylvia Rodríguez de Corajo called on Judge Juan R. Melecio to explain his reasons for not responding to the multiple complaints their group filed against the PNP regarding electoral matters.

EL VOCERO de PUERTO RICO

“PPD Accused of Attempting to Undermine PNP's Image”

By Dennise Y. Pérez

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In defense of Juan R. Melecio, the former judge who presided over the State Electoral Committee (CEE), two legislators from the New Progressive Party (PNP) accused the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) of seeking to destroy the credibility and dignity of an honorable person.

"The leaders of the Popular Democratic Party are small-minded. They cannot tolerate Melecio presiding over Pedro Rosselló's campaign. They want to kill the messenger by killing the message," said representative Jennifer González.

Last week, Pedro Rosselló appointed Melecio as chairman of his campaign committee. At that time, Melecio declared himself to be a statesman and in harmony with Rosselló's platform. Due to its credibility, the appointment came down like a bucket of cold water on Rosselló's opposition, who submitted yesterday seven [complaints of] instances in which Melecio issued decisions against the PPD. Representative González indicated that a list of Melecio's decisions is being compiled in order to refute the PPD's argument and that to date, 20 cases in which he decided against the PNP have already been found.

"An attempt is being made today to tarnish and destroy the reputation of an excellent public servant who throughout his career demonstrated by means of acts his ability to manage the CEE," said González, who also pointed out the record of Melecio's predecessor, Marcos Rodríguez Estrada, whose decisions supposedly always benefited the PPD.

"Fear and fright is preventing the PPD from recovering from the blow they have received due to the arrival of Judge Melecio," she explained.

Likewise, representative Melinda Romero described yesterday the PPD's accusations as "vicious, ridiculous, and unfounded."

"The statements made against Melecio are indicative of the terror felt by the PPD in facing Rosselló in an electoral campaign."

Romero also criticized Fernando Torres Ramírez, secretary of the PPD, who in his role as judge supposedly made political statements when he sentenced the former PNP senator Victor "The Owl" Merrero. In addition, she said that the current Secretary of State, Ferdinand Mercado, negotiated his position as secretary of the PPD while he was in office as a judge.

She also pointed out that when Aurelio Gracia, the current chairman of the CEE, stated in an interview with *El Vocero* that he was "for the people and the Commonwealth," none of the PPD's legislators called into question his freedom from bias.

[Picture caption] According to the PNP, Melecio's appointment to Rosselló's committee hit the PPD like a bucket of cold water.

EL VOCERO de PUERTO RICO

“Santini Rejects Criticism”

By Ivonne Y. Rosario

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Jorge Santini, mayor of San Juan, stated yesterday that given the absence of former governor Pedro Rosselló, he would take a passive role in the latter's primary campaign and defended former judge Juan R. Melecio's participation [in the same].

Santini stressed that given Rosselló's absence, he would take part in activities for Rosselló's benefit although he would do this in a passive capacity because he plans to devote himself to his work as mayor of San Juan.

Furthermore, he branded as irresponsible and small-minded those who expressed contempt for Melecio after he accepted his appointment as chairman of Rosselló's campaign [committee].

“Apparently, Judge Melecio is willing to be a victim of the onslaught as long as he can participate in what he sees as a change in government,” expressed Santini.

He reported that the current administration undertook to “aim the cannons at Melecio, and they tried to tarnish him by bringing about his resignation.”

With respect to the primaries between Rosselló and Carlos Pesquera, Santini assured that as vice-president of the New Progressive Party (PNP), he will strive to ensure that it is a fair and impartial process and above all that there is an honorable campaign between the candidates.

EL NUEVO DÍA

"Melecio Accused of Being an Accomplice in Siphoning Funds"

By Magdalys Rodríguez

Tuesday, March 25, 2003

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Héctor Ferrer, representative of the Popular Democratic Party (PPD), stated yesterday that Juan Melecio, former chairman of the State Electoral Committee (CEE), must explain to the country his reasons for not responding to the multiple complaints that the PPD filed with that committee against the New Progressive Party (PNP).

Ferrer accused Melecio of having been an accomplice in violations of the Electoral Act involving the siphoning of campaign funds by former governor Pedro Rosselló González and the New Progressive Party.

The legislator submitted to journalists a list of the cases in which the then-chairman of the CEE "played blind." Of these cases, he cited the one brought by César R. Miranda, former electoral commissioner of the PPD, because of a proven scheme in which PNP funds were siphoned to candidates for that party's Legislature in order to avoid the limit on advertising expenses that is imposed on candidates for governor.

The court ordered Melecio to hold an evidentiary hearing, but he never held it.

For the 1992 elections, faced with mere allegations by the PNP that the PPD and its candidate for governor, Victoria Muñoz, were exceeding the limit provided by the Electoral Act in their advertising media expenses, Melecio issued a cease and desist order so that they would refrain from giving instructions for announcements for their campaign, stated Ferrer.

"The PPD resorted to the court, and Melecio desisted from that order, given the fact that he was not competent to issue it," the legislator added.

For the 2000 elections, Melecio sought to hire the Department of Education's truck fleet so that it would take charge of carrying the electoral cases that would contain the voting ballots back and forth to the schools, Ferrer recalled.

"The CEE had always hired private truck fleets for this type of service," the legislator added.

"TO JUSTIFY this hiring, Melecio went so far as to alter the minutes of a meeting of the commissioners and the Chairman of the CEE in order to make them believe that they had authorized the hiring for those purposes, which was not correct," Ferrer stated.

"Melecio stated that he trusted Víctor Fajardo, whom he considered his friend. The Commissioner of the PPD, Carlos López Feliciano, insisted on the hiring of private trucks, and with the support of the PIP, Melecio was obliged to abandon his plan," said Ferrer.

He claimed that after his announced retirement, the former commissioner [of the] PNP, Pedro Figueroa, and the current commissioner, Thomas Rivera Schatz, promoted Melecio's hiring — with his approval — in the CEE by means of an exemption from the Office of Government Ethics (OEG).

As Ferrer recalled, López Feliciano objected to that hiring because it violated the retirement act, which prohibits retired persons from being hired to hold offices that correspond to regular governmental posts.

EL NUEVO DI A

“This Sense of Euphoria Shall Pass with Time”

By Pepe Garcia

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[Caption: Pesquera’s supporters affirm that with the departure of ex-Governor Pedro Rossello , the waters will return to normal and that the people will support the president of PNP]

The supporters of Carlos Pesquera hope that the sense of euphoria created by the return of Pedro Rossello  will start fading away after the weeklong visit of the former Governor of the island. They also believe that the appointment of Juan R. Melecio as the president of the Pedro Rossello  2004 committee will not have a critical effect in the primaries.

The same way, they expect the opposite with Pesquera. They argue that as he starts to concentrate his campaign all throughout the Island, the enthusiasm for the current president of the New Progressive Party (PNP) will increase.

On Rossello ’s side, his return to Washington, D.C is not worrisome. His supporters understand that his presence in the Island last week was enough to establish his leadership and the desire of the members of the New Progressive Party that he should be the candidate for governor.

Before his departure, Rosello  himself said that both Melecio and Frances Rodriguez, his campaign director, would stay behind and continue to engage the work group aimed at the 2004 campaign.

Pesquera, on his part, will continue with his intention to be the candidate for Governor for the PNP.

“I’m going to continue with an agenda filled with visits all throughout the island. I’m going to continue doing what I was doing before,” he said.

Pesquera said that “it’s possible” to revert back to his own person the sense of euphoria generated by the PNP upon Rossello ’s arrival.

“It’s necessary to establish that it was expected the former governor would get a warm welcome and that is part of a wave that arrives and that it was riding the crest of a wave at that time. All of that has helped move the electoral process forward for all of Puerto Rico and the PNP. In a way, it has helped us to focus and at the same, the people are going to pay more attention,” said Pesquera.

According to the PNP's president, he is going to be exposed to an analysis process and the supporters of the New Progressive Party will pay more attention to his proposals and his conviction that he is the best choice for 2004.

He highlighted that "the question is who has a better chance to win in 2004."

For Representative Jose Aponte, who was in charge of organizing the entire reception for Rossello□, the end result of the visit from the former governor "was much more than expected."

"The motivation, the disposition of the people to share and express their support for the ex-governor in all the activities was very meaningful and representative of how the Puerto Ricans feel," said Aponte.

As a matter of fact, Aponte said that some fellow legislators whose names he refused to make public, had said to Pesquera that their position had changed in favor of Rossello□ because "the people had demonstrated their support."

For the president of Pesquera's strategy committee, Edwin Mundo, Rossello□ was greeted by 50,000 people, but as he said, "only a 100 went to see him leave."

"What we have been saying is that the reception was a sign of gratitude but, during his visit and his personal appearances, the sense of euphoria faded away," said Mundo.

"Now begins the real campaign or ideas and issues during the next eight months. The sense of euphoria is gone and now is reality time. He (Rossello□) had to acknowledge the mistakes he made during the plebiscite, the implementation of the health card and the lack of supervision on the part of the government. He had to back up the proposal by Carlos Pesquera regarding the elimination of the judgments, the complaint against the government because of advertising and he agreed with Pesquera's health proposal," added Mundo.

With regard to Rossello□'s absence, Mundo said that in the end, it would not be beneficial for anybody.

"Definitely, this is a problem he has because he will not be able to react to the issues in Puerto Rico, but he does not have to pay attention to the issues of the previous government and the party," he added.

PRIMERA HORA

“They Bring Back to Life Melecio’s Previous Actions”

By Irene Garzón Fernández

Tuesday, March 25, 2003

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Melecio and Fajardo,

In an exercise to refresh your memory, three popular representatives yesterday listed several “prejudiced” actions against the Popular Democratic Party (Partido Popular Democrático or PPD) on the part of Juan R. Melecio as President of the Electoral Commission (Comisión Estatal de Elecciones or CEE) to put it in the context of his going public (“destape”) as Pedro Rosselló’s PNP and campaign director for the upcoming elections in 2004.

The alternate Chamber spokesperson Hector Ferrer called upon Melecio to explain the reasons he had not to attend to and for which he failed to act on multiple lawsuits brought by the PPD before the CEE and against the New Progressive Party (Partido Nuevo Progresista or PNP), accusing him of being an “accomplice” in the violations of the Electoral Laws related to the diversion of campaign funds by Rosselló and the PNP.

In a press conference called by Ferrer at the PPD headquarters where he was joined by his fellow representatives Jose M. Varela and Sylvio Rodriguez Corujo, they listed “questionable actions” by Melecio and which were denounced at the time by the PPD election commissioners Cesar Miranda, Rene Arrillaga Belendez and the current commissioner Carlos Lopez Feliciano, as well as by the former Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP) commissioner, Damaris U. Mangual. The list included a sample of six cases taken by the PPD to court whereby Melecio was revoked.

It was mentioned that for the 2000 elections, at the request of the CEE’s First Vice President, Juan Toledo, who is affiliated to PNP, Melecio pretended to hire the bus fleet from the Department of Education instead of the usual private buses, to take the election materials including ballots, to the voting colleges. Lopez Feliciano objected to such action because “he did not trust the then Education Minister, Victor Fajardo. “In order to justify such hiring, they went to the extreme of altering the minutes of one of the meetings between the Commissioners and the CEE President to make them believe that such hiring had been authorized for that purpose, which was not correct. Melecio stated that he trusted Victor Fajardo, whom he considered to be his friend,” added Rodriguez de Corujo when stating that Melecio was forced to give up hiring the buses from the Department of Education since Lopez Feliciano insisted, and supported by Mangual to hire private buses.

In the meantime, Ferrer brought up the case of “illegal transfers” from the PNP to the so called PNP “candidate backers” in the election process of 1996. On March 6 of that year,

Miranda, who at the time was PPD Election Commissioner and is now Secretary of State, filed a complaint with the CEE to start an investigation to determine if the expenses for the political campaign incurred in the media on behalf of the “candidate backers” Edison Mislá Aldarondo, Jose Granados Navedo, Nestor Aponte, Pedro Figueroa and Jorge Santini were “actually” part of the central PNP campaign and their government candidate, Rosselló.

According to *Primera Hora*’s records, Melecio dismissed the lawsuit and the PPD went to court which, through the then Judge Angel Hermida, on October 17, 1996 ordered the CEE to investigate the matter, which its former President never did. It was not until six years later, in November 2002, his successor Aurelio Gracia Morales, determined that the election organism should carry out the evidence hearing. Gracia’s decision is the object of a judicial review by the San Juan Court of First Instance at the request of the PNP.

In the 1996 sentence, when ordering the evidence hearing, Judge Hermida indicated that “the analysis of the complaint (by the PPD) made in the Resolution by the CEE President (Melecio)... revealed in more than one place that said officer did not grasp the essence of the complaint and that his decision to file rested in great part on a serious misunderstanding regarding the scope of the same.”

Ferrer called attention to the fact that while the case was still pending, the PNP appointed as its election commissioner former representative Figueroa, one of the “candidate backers,” and that “Melecio kept silent” when he should have expressed that the nominee had a complaint at the CEE still under investigation.

PRIMERA HORA

“SJ Mayor Comes Out in His Defense”

By Maritza Diaz Alcaido

Tuesday, March 25, 2001

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MAYOR Jorge Santini, who supported Pedro Rossello□ as a candidate for Governor, stated that “the people are going to severely punish” those criticizing the former President of the Electoral Commission (*Comisión Estatal de Elecciones or CEE*) Juan R. Melecio, currently president of the former governor’s campaign.

Santini came out fiercely defending Melecio during a press conference, stating that the only matter changing the image of the former president of the CEE is the fact that he now supports Rossello□.

Melecio has been under attack since last Friday for appearing next to the ex-governor as nothing less than a political ally, a phenomenon that brought back to the country’s political memory that one of the last decisions made by the former president of the CEE was in favor of the New Progressive Party (*Partido Nuevo Progresista or PNP*).

“I would like them not to be so small-minded dragging his name through the mud, when the only thing changing his image is that he now supports doctor Rossello... the people are going to punish severely whomever does that... whomever does that will have it on their conscience.” said the Mayor of the capital city.

As Vice President of the PNP, Santini is a self- proclaimed “officer of democracy.” He made a commitment to watch over the respect and rise to the occasion of the primary campaign and to be a facilitator.

I do not oppose anybody, neither doctor (Carlos) Pesqueira or doctor (Pedro) Rossello□, he said.

Photo: PRIMERA PLANA (name illegible)

[Caption:

Sentinel said he doesn’t want Melecio’s name dragged through the mud for being the president of Pedro Rossello□’s Governor’s campaign.]

PRIMERA HORA

“Jenniffer Gonzales Recalls who Appointed the Former President of the CEE”

By – [unspecified]

Tuesday, March 25, 2003

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THE REPRESENTATIVE from The New Progressive Party (PNP), Jenniffer Gonzalez, criticized yesterday what political leaders are saying against the former president of the Electoral Commission (*Comisión Estatal de Elecciones or CEE*), Juan R. Melecio, for having joined the campaign of Pedro Rossello□, who is now seeking the candidacy for governor for the New Progressive Party.

In a press conference in her legislative office, Gonzalez said that criticism against Melecio is only trying to “destroy and drag the reputation of an excellent public servant through the mud that, all throughout his career, has proven to society his ability to be at the helm and to direct the Electoral Commission with wisdom.

By the same token, she attributed the opinions against Melecio’s incursion in party politics to “fear and fright being felt by the people” as a result of Rossello□’s return to the political arena.

This criticism from Gonzales came up shortly after Representative Hector Ferrer questioned Melecio’s impartiality while President of the CEE and presented evidence of seven lawsuits that the Popular Democratic Party (*Partido Popular Democratico or PPD*) presented against Melecio’s decisions while he was the incumbent, AP reported.

Ferrer stated that Melecio made several decisions in favor of the New Progressive Party and which were appealed in court by the PPD.

Gonzales, on her part, recalled that Melecio had been appointed by then Governor Rafael Hernandez Colon from the PPD to his job, and that he had received a vote of confidence from both the New Progressive Party and the Puerto Rican Independence Party.

“Every time he tried to step down, there was a choir of voices asking him to stay”, recalled the representative.

And it happened as early as just a few months ago, popular legislators such as Eudaldo Baez Galib, Antonio Faz Alzamora and Carlos Viscarrondo, expressed that under his presidency, the CEE “reached the greatest credibility and prestige for Puerto Rico at an international level.”
